

"THE STUDENT MOVEMENT FOR PALESTINE'S LIBERATION HAS GROWN OVER THE LAST DECADE, ESPECIALLY WITH THE BLATANCY OF ISRAEL'S VIOLENCE. THE YOUTH ARE EXPECTED TO REPRODUCE THIS SAME SICK SOCIETY OF DEATH FOR ALL, EITHER IMMEDIATE OR PROTRACTED. WHEN THEY SEE THROUGH THE FAÇADE OF STATE JUSTICE, THE STATUS QUO IS IN DANGER. WHEN YOUTH REFUSE TO REPRODUCE THIS WORLD, WE REACH A BREAKING POINT. THE YOUTH ARE CHANGING GENDERS, FIGHTING POLICE, TRYING TO TOPPLE CAPITALISM AND THE STATE. THEY ARE NOT SERVED BY ANY OF THE SYSTEMS IN PLACE AND HAVE NO HOPE FOR CAREERS, LET ALONE LIFE ON A PLANET SECURED FOR DESTRUCTION BY ENDLESS EXTRACTION."



FRONTLINE UNIVERSITY

THE STRUGGLE IN THE SCHOOLS

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Knowledge must be presented in a manner that
enlarges the horizon instead of restricting it.

-Louise Michel

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uncovering of the lie. Thus we can't glorify the need for resistance when backed against the wall. And yet the refusal to comply, the youth absenting themselves from the dutiful roles expected speaks to new possibilities. There's precedence in the student movements against Vietnam, though the energy was captured and revolutionary possibility stamped out with repression or bought off with careers. The repression is assured, but the cooptation is getting less and less likely. At some point, there will be nothing to assimilate into.

The world that the US and Israel supposedly promise, overcoming of prejudice and violence, space of opportunity for creative expression and ultimate wellbeing, our hope that history is a progress narrative and that we can keep faith in the project of humanity and civilization—this world does not exist. Our senses continually belie the myth we are taught in schools. And the schools can no longer serve as the probable vehicle for this upward mobility. We should not underestimate the possibilities of youth who refuse to steward the transfer of wealth and power. When they say no to this world, we must have their backs.

I have been building my thoughts from my essays "No State Solution" and "Social Peace," in an attempt to say the unsaid perspectives of us going through the motions of protest in the face of unspeakable horror. While the first necessary measure is a stop to the genocide in Gaza, and the ultimate aim is an end to Israeli occupation (and all states!), the issue as it shows up in the US is perhaps taking its most clear expression in schools and workplaces. The social issue in the US isn't acute, but rather points to what opinions are tolerable. While those who govern may be more and more blatant in their cynical disregard for life, certain actions we take do cause threats. The street protests are tolerated, but employees and students taking a stand causes a threat. In these moments, we see the state and its deputized institutions cracking down on us looking at its cracks.

As Andrea Long Chu details in her astute rendering of the so-called debate, the issue in universities around the genocide in Gaza by Israel is not really about free speech. She explains that calling it a free speech debate a trap, since free speech is only a self-created issue for a liberal democratic republic. Ending a genocide isn't a matter of making a statement in a marketplace of ideas. Regardless, anarchists can sidestep this trap, since we want to end liberal democracy and all its state forms. Our goal isn't government-protected free speech. Of course, we might invoke it if and when we are criminalized, but that's a question simply of using their tools to keep us free from their cages. And that outcome is never assured.[1]

In "Social Peace," I was wondering whether the best we can hope for in our recent struggles is a radicalization process for those involved. I was examining the fact that many of these moments, from Palestinian solidarity, to Stop Cop City, COVID, and George Floyd, have given the

[1]I'm currently working on another essay about how anarchism itself is caught in a liberal ideological trap, posing an answer to the self-imposed question of freedom wrought in bondage by Enlightenment thinking.

people involved who are new to radical politics very clear lessons on how little the governing bodies care about our lives, what we want, or what is right. In fact, politicians get more blatant and cynical in their gleeful smashing of our prospects, stopping their ears to any demands, even when reasonable and in their language.

While, on the one hand, the desire for more people's eyes to open to the brute fact of oppression is real, on the other, this is a very thin achievement of our struggle. Though we perennially seek ways to recruit people to the struggle for liberation, what I call "the seductions of anarchism," seeing the oppression of the state and capital explicitly isn't seductive—though it is angering. As John Lydon sang, "anger is an energy," but it's not enough for life, and it often produces ineffective responses.

In the street, when the police shoot at the crowd, we see that the police are not there to protect the people. When there is an ongoing pandemic with untold long-term health consequences and the state defunds testing and vaccines and tries to erase the effects, we see that the lives of people are not necessary to rule and profit. When a development project for a police training center to subdue civilians is overwhelmingly unpopular and everything from direct action and occupation to referenda, voting, and city council participation is met with an insistence on building it no matter what "the people" say, it's clear that there is no true "representation" in democracy. Same thing when an overwhelming mass of people demand ceasefire and the state bypasses rules to give more money and weapons towards ongoing genocide.

It's a tradition in leftist thinking like to identify the contradictions. I don't even know if these are contradictions any more. More like clear grasps at brute force in the dying empire. Corpse-like hands withering away, but still the grip of rigor mortis persists. The interest in contradiction comes from Hegelian-Marxism, with the idea that the dynamic force of contradictions will produce a resolution, or a self-abolition of the contradiction (*Aufhebung*). The dialectic imagines that the contradiction produces a reflection that then surpasses it, moves it to a higher level. We can see this also in the hope that "consciousness" will then produce political results. We are faced with a contradiction, we

genocide, the representatives in power, who cowardly support Israel and continue to condone and fund these massacres, will point to the robust opposition that demonstrators have mounted as proof that we in the US have conscience, that there is such a thing as progress. They may come to publicly regret their support and then wash their hands with the efforts of so many to demand a ceasefire. In other words, we are preparing their alibi.

In the schools, there is a more direct confrontation with explicit forms of control. Though it lacks the intensity of police violence, it is no less brutal in its directness: the status quo cannot be maintained if more and more people see Israel for what it is. If the myth of Israel as the redemption of Europe's crimes gets exposed as an extension of (settler) colonialism, using Jews as its cover; if Israel's attempt to stand for all Jews as vengeance for centuries of persecution, to redeem the weak bookish Jew as the macho soldier is seen as simple bloodlust—the claims to righteousness in the project of the US will also be exposed. Both Israel and US hide their extreme violence under myths of progress: we have thrown off the prejudices of antisemitism, racism, aristocratic rule, and are shining beacons of liberty (light among the darkness, its own racist mythology).

The student movement for Palestine's liberation has grown over the last decade, especially with the blatancy of Israel's violence. The youth are expected to reproduce this same sick society of death for all, either immediate or protracted. When they see through the façade of state justice, the status quo is in danger. When youth refuse to reproduce this world, we reach a breaking point. The youth are changing genders, fighting police, trying to topple capitalism and the state. They are not served by any of the systems in place and have no hope for careers, let alone life on a planet secured for destruction by endless extraction.

Students are on the frontline of a new struggle for the world. It's not a matter of a self-fulfilling prophecy, or a contradiction that will resolve itself necessarily in communism. The forces of the state are gathering in their death grips to beat down any resistance. Our liberation is not promised, everything is contingent. We can't hope for good outcomes simply from political consciousness or the experience of the

express bloodlust of the IDF and other Zionist social media campaigns, who slobber over massacres in the most disgusting way. (I'm going to bracket my own Jewish feelings of betrayal about this ...)

In an almost minimal act of conscience, speaking up against this genocide and for the very placid demand for ceasefire is being met with severe consequence for university students, not to mention more protracted punishment for those who dare even further: doxing, expulsion, reprimands, and then a shakeup of university administration. Donors have demanded that universities silence opposition to the war by calling any solidarity with Palestine antisemitism. Organizations have doxed pro-Palestinian students and threatened to blacklist them from potential employment. Some have been penalized by school administrations. Presidents of universities who dare to offer some kind of protection to students have been censured, called before congress, and forced to resign.

This conflict on campuses shows very clearly that the issue isn't one of free speech or academic freedom; there isn't a debate about the right of states to exist, of the morality of genocide, of the problems of the settler state. The brute fact being shown in the extreme crackdown on any dissent clearly shows that the corporate university, as a place to launder money or speculate on property, is a proxy for governing. Schools are not educational delivery vehicles, but governing bodies. The illusion of the individual's pathway through college education to identity and vocation has been smashed by the reality of capitalism's ravages on all life prospects. And the deathworld of Gaza is the inevitable outcome of these forces. But here in the states, the students are learning the university is a mere extension of the public school K-12: put youth in their places. A place of death-to-come.

The struggle in the schools to oppose Israeli genocide differs from the street protest and civil disobedience movement that has been massive and ongoing since October 7. As I've already written, the people marching and getting arrested are meeting the dead end of protest and facing the disinterest of the governing bodies in any form of representation. However, these protests haven't escalated into frontal clashes with the police, which shows that they aren't ultimately a threat to the status quo. In fact, it is quite likely that, in the ashes of the

gain consciousness of our subjectivity, and then we become revolutionaries (this is simplified, of course). Similarly, they think the contradictions of capital and crisis will eventually lead to the overcoming of capitalism. And yet this hasn't happened, the contradictions pile up, and we keep eating capitalism. In fact crisis is how capital and the state maintain rule.

So, if the best we can hope for is the political awakening of the newcomers through confrontation with these contradictions, it's like giving hope to revolution as an inevitable force (more inevitable than the supposed inevitability of capitalism and the state). It's more hope in massive politics: the more people awakened, the less they will stand this goddamned mess. And in my mind, we don't want a revolution, which only prepares the way for another state, more rule.

There is something else happening in the attack on student solidarity with Palestine in the universities, though it is related to this exposure of contradictions. This development in repression is continuous with the attempts to control the teaching of slavery, anti-Black racism, Indigenous genocide, gender and sexuality in primary and secondary schools.

The mistake is in thinking that education is a place of freedom at all. There is a tradition in liberatory movements to imagine that education is essential to the struggle. This thought follows out the hope that contradiction produces consciousness and action: in other words, political education. However, the structure of schooling does not allow for freedom. It's not their education that we are lacking. Schooling trains us to take up our positions in hierarchy. It indoctrinates us to the ruling ideology. When we shake our heads at the history we missed in our education, it's not the failure of education but the success that we are commenting on. To hope for the stories of resistance to be told in the institutions misconstrues the purpose of school. It is only by contingency or by theft, as Moten and Harney argue, that any liberatory practice can be gleaned or wrenched from their stranglehold on resources.

Today's college students inhabit a number of "contradictions," sure. One of them is an atavistic positionality of the manager-to-be, the

previous product of universities. The lie of progressive democracy was that university was a step in climbing the social-economic ladder. The truth is that the schools have mostly been places that guard wealth and hoard knowledge, shoring up the racialized class distinctions, save for the exceptions that can be paraded around, the lottery ticket in the wild, those who really make it.

There may have been a time when a college education led to professional employment, a salary and a secure job—for some. I think that time has been overestimated, and surely it is over. While some of the elite will still be recruited by Wall Street or eventually corporate law firms, and there are pathways for the right ones to governance and corporate positions, for most people the middling professions are mostly closed, desiccated, offering slim chances. We all know students take on immense debt for the minimal possibility of employment. This situation explains why so many schools emphasize “entrepreneurship.” Students will be on their own in the marketplace, trying to monetize their existence to scrape by, make rent, buy food, and keep up to date on loan payments.

Add to this the fact that today's college students finished high school during COVID lockdowns, pivoting to online classes, which showed the seams of the whole educational institution. All the arbitrariness of the rules and the disciplinary norms became visible. Weighing school against caretaking for ill family members, the important work is very clear. There is often a leap from the experience of high school, which is ultimately a structure that keeps kids orderly in seats so they won't be ungovernable on the streets, to the experience of college, where the myth is that you pursue your interests and develop your identity. However, many students come in to college, now even more, bringing that sense of forced compliance to their “higher” education. The classroom is just a place to hold them down.

But now, let's add the experience that many of these students witnessed firsthand of the police violence against crowds during the George Floyd rebellions (not to mention the continual imagery of police striking people down individually). They withheld water cannons, mace, rubber bullets, all the “less lethals.” They saw the impossible demand of abolition get narrowed to the realistic ask of

defund, to the democratic parrying of lip service towards reparations that will never come. All with the backlash against so-called critical race theory and a total onslaught against trans and queer people of all ages. They saw that no one will save them.

No matter their position on Zionism or Israel, how long they've been “for the cause” of Palestinian liberation, this crop of students is now witnessing along with the world the brutal US-funded genocide, and in the spirit of student antiwar activism, and with the structures already in place of Palestinian and Arab organizers and the strengthening band of anti-Zionist Jews, they countered the institutions that were supposedly shepherding them to take on the controls of capital and the state.

The current crackdown on Palestinian solidarity can certainly be connected to the last near decade of anti-fascist organizing on campus, deplatforming “right wing/conservative thinkers.” The right, the center, even the left have all framed these as free speech issues. These issues have also been conflated with academic freedom. Freedom of speech, as Long Chu explains, is a right protected by the state in its publics, and the private university can make its own rules. Academic freedom, as Arendt conceived it idealistically, was to provide an organ of critique of the status quo. None of these ideas are actual. They remain continually virtual. Speech is used as a bludgeon, academic freedom as an alibi. (Bludgeon against disruptions of the status quo, alibi for cowardice of imagination in favor of career.)

The difference between the previous deplatforming campaigns and the current attempts at solidarity for Palestine, whether through shutting down speakers, demanding divestment, or just raising awareness, is that the (arguably) future violence of fascists is replaced by the constant deluge of videos of carnage currently perpetrated by the Israeli state forces. Yes, US students live in their own atmosphere of violence, but the scale is very different in Gaza. In a matter of weeks, there have been tens of thousands of deaths. People have witnessed these deaths firsthand, especially through parasocial attachments on social media. While watching these massacres unfold, they are also hearing the blatant propaganda of the US, the hasbara of Israel and diasporic Zionists: the images contradict the words. They witness the